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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 001093

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SUBJECT: NIGER: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH PRESIDENT TANDJA ON
MCA THRESHOLD PROGRAM AND FOOD SECURITY

Classified By: Ambassador Bernadette M. Allen, Reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (U) Summary. On November 11, Ambassador Allen, accompanied by USAID Country Program Manager (CPM) Wentling and USAID/MCC Threshold Program Manager (TPM) Schulman, met with President Tandja, his Cabinet Director Maman and Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Dagra to discuss supplemental food security funds, the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) score card for Niger (shared with Foreign Minister Mindaoudou on November 4) and the girls' education component of Niger's MCA Threshold Program. Tandja lauded the U.S. election process and the American people for showcasing democracy at its best and noted that U.S. President-Elect Obama conducted an admirable campaign. He welcomed the additional food security funding slated for Niger and expressed concerns about one aspect of the MCA girls' education component of the MCA Threshold Program. End summary.

¶2. (U) Tandja and the Ambassador discussed the U.S. Presidential elections and the lesson learned worldwide that candidates could hold a highly contested election without violence. Tandja mentioned civil society activism in Niger, but didn't raise concerns about possible negative effects on Niger's legislative and Presidential elections slated for November/December 2009.

¶3. (U) Tandja was pleased to learn about the additional US\$5 million in food security funds that Niger will receive. He spoke of needs in agriculture and animal husbandry. He mentioned Niger's successful harvest of cowpeas and millet, but added the glut in the onion harvest has not been helpful to farmers. He stated Niger needs more slaughterhouses, as the demand for meat from buyers in neighboring Nigeria remains heavy and continues to rise.

¶4. (U) The Ambassador presented Tandja a copy of the FY'09 MCC score card for Niger and informed him that the results had been discussed the prior week with the FM Mindaoudou, including the drop in indicators such as civil liberties and business startup.

¶5. (C) The rest of the meeting was an intense discussion about the girls' education component of the MCA Threshold program. Ambassador noted she had learned that President Tandja wanted a modification to the implementation plan that initially had been designed to target two regions in the country. She emphasized, with the support of the USAID CPM and USAID/MCC TPM, the need to quickly show an impact from MCA schools, that it had been determined it would be easier to track program impact if it weren't spread across too many regions. Tandja insisted the program needs to cover all eight regions, even if only a few schools are built in six regions and the majority of schools target the two regions originally planned. Raising the economic downturn and the possibility that a delay in program implementation could put funding for Niger's Threshold Program at risk, the Ambassador asked whether the GON could fund additional schools in other regions or find another donor partner to fund schools in other regions, using the MCA school model. Tandja

indicated it is unlikely. He cited political reasons for wanting the implementation plan changed, emphasizing he could not accept building MCA schools in only two regions as the other regions would be jealous and complain. He said he is prepared to delay the program until we are ready to work in all regions and acknowledged that he recognized the risk of losing the program entirely. He said he could swallow more easily explaining to Nigeriens that the MCA program was lost because he wanted equitable treatment for all regions, than having to deal with protests and complaints about favoritism of one region over another. He said some of Niger's past civil unrest and conflict has been initiated by groups in regions that complain about being left out of beneficial programs. He said it wouldn't be fair for only girls and boys in two regions to benefit from the MCA schools, that the MCA schools are so much better than the open air/thatched roof schools being built by the GON. He added he had discussed the MCA schools with Minister of Education Ousmane (out of the country on the day of this meeting) in the early months of designing Niger's concept plan, but that he hadn't focused on the expansive complex design (classrooms, latrine, canteen, housing for female teachers) of the MCA schools, that he thought the design was for classrooms only.

16. (U) USAID/MCC TPM stated that the Embassy was trying to work with our implementation partner to complete a counter-proposal in the next several days. USAID CPM noted that much of Niger's original program design was based on lessons learned from Burkina Faso's Threshold Program. Ambassador reiterated concerns that modification of the plan may kill the program and emphasized our hope to continue working with the GON on this project that is so vital to

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improving educational opportunities for girls and boys.
(Note. Results of this meeting were emailed to Embassy Accra USAID/WA on November 11. End note.)
ALLEN